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No. 202

THE BEST MAN

A Comedy in One Act

BY

ELEANOR MAUD CRANE

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THE BEST MAN

A Comedy in One Act.

CHARACTERS :

MR. RICHARD FORD	The Bridegroom.
MR. GEORGE BRADLY	The Best Man.
MISS MARGARET GIBSON	The Bride.
MISS MARION GIBSON	The Maid of Honor.

SCENE : *Vestry-room of St. Paul's Church, Fairview, N. Y.*

Modern Costumes.

TIME : The present.

PROPERTIES.

Stage properties as per scene-plot at head of act. Grips, umbrellas and light rain-coats for men to enter with. Shoe-box containing new patent-leather ties, with red-paper hearts pasted upon the soles, for George to carry. Both men have watches which they consult constantly. Pink evening-dress, slippers, gloves, fan, and pink silk stockings in grip carried by Dick.

Dainty gowns protected by light wraps worn by girls. Both carry dripping umbrellas. Marion has a grip the duplicate of Dick's.

THE BEST MAN

A Comedy in One Act.

SCENE.—*Vestry-room of St. Paul's Church, Fairview, N. Y.—Doors D. L. and U. R. Three or four high-backed, ecclesiastical-looking chairs. A table upon which half a dozen hymnals are piled. A few suitable pictures, etchings or engravings of prominent buildings of a religious nature. Potted plants and flowers, evidently intended for the church decorations, will relieve severity.*

TIME,—Late afternoon.

(*Enter RICHARD FORD D., L. carrying grip which he deposits on chair. Shakes few drops of rain off his umbrella, places his hat on grip, nervously looks at his watch and compares it with clock, talking over his shoulder to GEORGE BRADLY who follows him into room.*) It's all very well for you to be so infernally funny about it, but I tell you it's no laughing matter.

GEORGE (*locking door, removing his hat and proceeding to undo box, containing a pair of shoes, which he has brought in under his arm*). My dear Dicky, the holy state of matrimony.

DICK (*stopping in the act of removing his ties*). If you don't shut up I'll break your head.

GEORGE. Now if that wouldn't jar you. Here I've come to officiate as chief pall-bearer. Hi, there (*dodging the shoe which DICK throws at him*), I've got my fingers crossed.

DICK (*angry and nervous*). D—dash you, George, I—I'm not joking. I'm in a blue flunk. Do—do—do you suppose it's too late to—to——

GEORGE (*rolling up string*). Send your regrets? Well, rather. (*Half sings, half whistles*) Can't get away to marry you to-day, my nerve won't let me. (*Holds up ties that he has just taken from box so the audience can see bright red hearts pasted on the soles.*) Aren't they butes? (*Holding them so DICK can't see the soles then kneeling before him to help him get them on*) Here, let me give you a boost?

DICK. You needn't. I can manage. Have you got the ring?

GEORGE (*rising to his feet, brushing his knees then looking at DICK's disconsolate expression*). Yes, but for the love of Mike, man, change your face. Think of something pleasant.

DICK (*dolefully*). There's nothing pleasant to think about. (*Looks up angrily into GEORGE's laughing face*) Now, what in blazes are you laughing at, you blooming idiot?

GEORGE (*sinking into a chair*). Dicky boy, you're the joy of me life. You're a three-ring circus all by your lonesome.

DICK. Feel like a lunatic asylum let loose. There, I've broken my collar. Hope you brought an extra one.

GEORGE (*slapping his pockets*). Gee, I forgot all about it. And you can't wear that. It's a sight.

DICK. Never mind, there's one in my grip. (*GEORGE proceeds to undo grip*) Easy now, she's pretty full.

GEORGE (*starting back in surprise as grip opens and reveals a pretty pink evening dress, pink slippers, gloves, fan and accessories to lady's evening dress*). Great Jumping Jehosophat, look who's here!

DICK (*starting up in dismay*). Where in blazes did those things come from?

GEORGE. You can search me. (*Holds up dress*) What do you call it? Is she coming or going?

DICK. Drop it, George. You'll get into trouble.

GEORGE (*looking at dress admiringly*). She's a peach all right. (*Holds up slippers*) By Jove, aren't they the cutest tricks you ever saw? Imagine walking upon the things that fit into these and calling them feet. Say, Dicky, I believe these belong to the bride-to-be.

DICK. Bride nothing. Brides don't wear pink.

GEORGE. Don't they? Why not?

DICK. Give it up. Only know they don't.

GEORGE. I never noticed. Never had any use for them. It was always the bridesmaids for mine.

DICK (*as GEORGE holds up dress again*). It can't be Mabel Hills. She's too—well—too—too—you know, to fit into that.

GEORGE. She'd *fit* all right if she'd go "as is" but she wouldn't. Nay, nay, never.

"What the Lord has forgotten
She made up in cotton."

DICK (*pacing to and fro*). Wish it were over. Know I'm going to trip up on those infernal commandments and make a mess of things generally. Let's see, how does it begin? Now I lay me——

GEORGE (*taking up prayer-book from table*). Wait a minute, here's the dope-sheet. I'll give you your cues. (*Places* DICK D. R.) You'll be about here, where everyone can see you.

DICK. Like fun, I will. Look here, George, isn't there a pillar or—or something big and—and high that we can stand beside.

GEORGE (*patting DICK's shoulder*). Don't be afraid, little one. I'll hold your hand.

DICK (*shaking him off*). Get out. Do you know I can put up with everything but that infernal waiting at the head of that—that Bridal-path with all those grinning faces glowering at me? Why the devil a man can't get married decently without making a holy show of himself, I can't see.

GEORGE. Then they'll start up the Dead-march. Like this

Dum, dum, dee-dum,
Dum, dum, dee-dum,

Dum, dum, dum, dum, dum, dum, dum, dee-dum. Only miles slower.

DICK. Did you say you had the ring?

GEORGE. Yes, and when I give it to you, you bridge it to Margaret, she passes it to His Nibbs and he goes back 'til it's up to you again.

DICK. If you'll quit your ragging and talk United States——

GEORGE. I'm not kidding. That's straight. It's a sort of "Button, button, whose got the button?" game, but when it's over you're "it" once more.

DICK (*grimly*). Seems to me I'm "*it*" right along.

GEORGE. Then when he says, "for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse, 'til death us do part and may the Lord have mercy on your soul," you kneel.

DICK. That's a blessing, I'm so wobbly in my knees now, I can't walk.

GEORGE. See here. You're not going to disgrace me in this fashion. It's really a painless death after all and soon over, so hold up your head, throw out your chest and be a man.

DICK (*sinking disconsolately into chair*). How can I when I feel like a cur?

GEORGE (*shaking his head at him*). How the devil you ever screwed up enough courage to propose to that girl gets me!

DICK (*sighing*). I—I didn't.

GEORGE (*aghast*). Didn't! Do you mean to say that she— (*leaning back in disgust*) Oh, you're mooney.

DICK. George, if I tell you something, will you swear, by all that's holy, you'll never breathe a word of it to a soul?

GEORGE. I slomestly plomess.

DICK. And you'll forget it as soon as I tell you?

GEORGE. I'll do my durndest.

DICK. Well, I never knew it was Margaret I'd

proposed to till the next day. Thought it was Marion. There—Now do you blame me for feeling like a hound?

GEORGE (*in almost speechless astonishment*). By—by Jupiter, Dick, come again. I—I don't grasp it.

DICK. Neither did I at first. It was the night of the Farleys' Ball, last February. We were in the conservatory. You—you know their conservatory?

GEORGE. Well, I guess! Dim, shadowy. Proposed to four girls there in one night.

DICK. That's the place. Well, she left me for a dance with that Benson fellow. Know him?

GEORGE. Yes. Decent sort of chap.

DICK. Silly ass, you mean. Well, I waited for her and—and she came back. At least I *thought* she did. Their voices are alike, you know, and they both had on sort of white kimona thingumbobs. And—and well—I did it then. She—she seemed a bit taken back and asked me to give her time. Just then some fool rushed up, butted in, carried her off, and I didn't get another opportunity to speak to her again that night. The next morning she sent me a little note saying she felt honored and all that and signed herself mine forever.—*Margaret*.

GEORGE. Well, I'll be——

DICK (*smiling faintly*). That—that's what I said.

GEORGE. And you let this—this—farce go on?

DICK. What else could I do? I couldn't tell a girl after she'd accepted me that I didn't mean her at all but her sister. Beside Marion didn't care for me, I found that out shortly afterwards, and—and Margaret did.

GEORGE. Oh, she did, did she?

DICK. Must have or she'd never have accepted me.

GEORGE (*thoughtfully*). Well, I'll be——

DICK (*impatiently*). You said that before.

GEORGE (*half to himself*). The night of the Farleys' Ball—that was the time of *our* falling out. By Jove what an ass I've been! what an owl! what a dope! And all this time—well, I'll be——

DICK. If you say that again I'll choke you.

GEORGE. Dicky, you're an angel, you're a—a—I could hug you.

DICK (*looking at GEORGE in surprise*). Are you crazy?

GEORGE. I think I am. Why don't you see? Can't you see? It's as clear as daylight.

DICK. No, I don't see. I can't see anything. I should say it's as clear as mud. If you will kindly explain——

GEORGE. I can't. I am too excited. By Jove, but she was game. She's a thoroughbred clear through.

DICK. Well, I'll be hanged if I know what you're ranting about, but I can't tell you what a relief it is to——

GEORGE. To get this off your chest. I don't doubt it.

DICK. Remember you promised to forget it.

GEORGE. Forget your grandmother. Why that girl, that girl,—what time is she to get here? Has that clock stopped?

DICK (*looking at his watch*). I wish it had. Wish all the clocks would stop. (*Stops before grip*) By Jove, wish I knew whom that grip belongs to, for whoever owns it has got mine and that means trouble.

GEORGE. Jingo, I have it, it's Marion's. Of course it is. Don't you remember we met her at the station and stopped to shake hands and pow-wow. Said she'd just gotten in from Boston for the wedding. Is that some one coming, Dick? (*Stops, listens.*)

GEORGE. Holy smoke, it's the parson. (*Jams things into grip, toe of one pink silk stocking dangling out*) Here, get them in somehow. Now I cut with this to the girls and you wait for me here.

DICK. Alone? Not much. Why he'll want me to sign the pledge, or—or say the catechism. No, sir. I'm going right with you.

GEORGE. But we can't *both* leave. They'll all be here any minute and think we're showing the white feather. You straighten out the grips and I'll wait. I'm not afraid of the Dominie. This way through the

church. (*Opens door U. R. gives DICK his hat and the grip*) Now beat it.

(*Exit DICK U. R. K knock at door D. L.*)

GEORGE (*going to center and playing nervously with book*). Oh, er—come in. (*The knob is turned but the door doesn't open*) Gee, I forgot it was loaded. (*Opens door with a flourish*) I beg your pardon. (*Stops aghast at seeing MARGARET GIBSON standing on the threshold*) Mar—Mar—garet—

MARGARET (*looking at him in amazement*). Mr. Bradly.

GEORGE (*nervously catching up his hat and twisting it rapidly as he talks*). I—er—I—that—is you. It—it's a nice day.

MARGARET (*shaking her umbrella nervously*). Is—is it?

GEORGE (*fanning himself with hat*). Yes, that is—it—it would be if—if it wasn't raining. Of course rain—well, rain sort of spoils it. It—it's always so beastly wet, you know.

MARGARET. Is—is it?

GEORGE (*mopping his forehead*). Yes. That—that is some rain is. I—I mean rain—rain is sometimes. What I really mean is—is—some rain is—is wetter than others. It—is really.

MARGARET (*coming forward and speaking in a low voice*). I—I hardly expected to—to find you here.

GEORGE. Nei—neither did I. It's—it's as much a surprise to—to me as it is to—to you.—It is, really.

MARGARET. I—I thought you were—some place else.

GEORGE. Yes, yes, I—I was I—go there often—very often. But—but I—I'm not there now.

MARGARET. So—I see.

GEORGE. No—I—I'm not there now, because—because—I—I'm here. You—you see, Dick's best man failed him. He—he's desperately ill, you know.

MARGARET. Mr. Lawrence ill?

GEORGE. Yes. He—he went to the hospital to

have his tonsils removed—simple operation, you know, very simple. But they made a mistake and—and took out his appendix. So—so, you see, he—he couldn't get here and Dicky sort of roped me in.

MARGARET. I—I understand.

GEORGE (*relieved*). That—that's jolly good of you. I was tremendously afraid you wouldn't. That—that you think it rather queer my—my butting in. Are—are you sure you don't mind?

MARGARET (*slowly*). No, I—I don't mind. Only you—you took me by surprise. I didn't know—I had no idea that you——

GEORGE (*interrupting her*). Neither did I. I can't quite grasp it now. If—if any one had told me last February that before the year was out I would be best man at *your* wedding, I'd—I'd well I'd have thought they were dippy.

MARGARET. It's—very kind of you.

GEORGE. Kind? kind? Margaret. *Taking her hand*) What's the use of all this pretending. I—I just couldn't stay away another minute.

MARGARET (*turning from him*). Don't, Mr.—Bradly, you—you mustn't. It—it's too late.

GEORGE. I know it is. I've been a fool—a blind fool and I've lost you and I've only got myself to blame. I know it all better than anyone can tell me. I know in twenty-four hours you are going to be married to him—that you have come here now for the rehearsal, that in a few minutes they will all be here and I shall never see you like this again.

MARGARET. George, I can't let you talk so. You don't realize what you are saying.

GEORGE (*bitterly*). But I do. I realize all—everything. I realize that I've been a fool and that I've got to suffer for it all my life. That this is part of the price I've got to pay for my folly. To stand by and see you married to him. To see you made *his* wife and all the while I—I——

MARGARET. George, please.

GEORGE. Oh, don't worry. I shall behave myself.

I shall throw rice and old shoes with the best of them. I'll be the jolliest of the bunch. You'll see.

MARGARET, If I had only dreamed——

GEORGE. But you didn't, how could you? I—I acted like a brute and you naturally thought I was one.

MARGARET (*quickly looking up from her seat beside the table*). I didn't at all. I thought.—(*Pauses.*)

GEORGE (*bending over her*). What, Margaret? Tell me, what did you think?

MARGARET. I thought you were—in love with Marion.

GEORGE. Marion? Marion? You don't mean Marion?

MARGARET. Yes. You—you were always together and—and I knew you were too—honorable to ask for your release so—so I set you free.

GEORGE. But you engaged yourself to Dick?

MARGARET. Yes, I know. I never dreamed he cared for me. But, when I found that he did, I—I thought I could at least make *him* happy. Besides I—I didn't want you to think that I had any regrets. So—so—well—that's all.

GEORGE. And—and you never cared a hang for him. Margaret, my own little sweetheart. (*Kneels beside her, kissing her hands,*)

MARGARET (*rising*). Don't, George. You—you mustn't.

GEORGE. Mustn't I? When I've been starving for a sight of your face for all these months? (*Tries to take her in his arms.*)

MARGARET. George, you—you—forget. Suppose some one should come in?

GEORGE. Let them. Let the whole world come in. Let——

(*Enter MARION D. L. MARGARET rushes to opposite side of room. GEORGE walks to window straightening his tie, his back to MARION.*)

MARION (*laughing*). Don't mind me. I've got

both eyes shut. I just want to know if Dick took my grip by mistake at the station.

GEORGE (*turning quickly*). Yes, he did, but——

MARION (*looking in surprise from GEORGE to MARGARET*). Mr. Bradley. Why, why, I thought Dick was here with Margaret.

GEORGE. He—he is. I—I mean he—he was. That is he is looking for you.

MARION. For me?

GEORGE. Yes. You see it's been you he's wanted all along.

MARION. What under the sun are you talking about? Dick wants me?

GEORGE. Yes. He—he's only just found it out. (*Ruefully*) But, by Jove, I don't suppose I should be the one to spring it on you.

MARION. I—I don't understand.

GEORGE. Neither did I at first. Nor he, nor Margaret for that matter. But it's all coming straight. It is really.

MARION. Margaret, what on earth does he mean?

MARGARET (*putting her arms around MARION and her head down on her shoulder*). I don't know. But oh, Marion, he does care. He's cared all along. I—I can't help crying I—I'm so happy.

MARION (*in disgust*). Well, I think this wedding's gone to everybody's head. I can't get a grain of sense out of a single soul to-day. (*To GEORGE*) I ask you where my grip is and you——

GEORGE (*interrupting her*). I told you Dick has it.

MARION. But what is he doing with it?

GEORGE. Trying to find you. Here he is now. (*Enter DICK D. L. with grip.*)

DICK (*going to MARION*). Marion, I've been chasing you all over town.

MARION (*catching sight of pink silk stocking hanging from grip*). Do—do you mean to say that you carried that grip—so—through the place?

DICK. Of course I did. What's the matter with that grip?

MARION (*indignantly taking grip from him and going U. R. with MARGARET*). What's the matter with it? What's the matter with it?

(*Exit MARION and MARGARET U. R.*)

GEORGE (*slapping DICK on the back joyfully*). Dick, you *were* right. I've straightened it all out. Shake, old man. (*Holding out his hand*) Congratulate me. If it hadn't been for you, I—I'd—Are you sure you've no objections?

DICK. Objections? I? What right have I to object? You—you're a lucky fellow.

GEORGE. And now what are we going to do about the rehearsal?

DICK (*puzzled*). The rehearsal?

GEORGE. Yes, the rehearsal. For the love of Mike don't look so dumb. Haven't we all come here for the rehearsal?

DICK. Yes, but what of it?

GEORGE. What of it? Why man alive, it can't go on *now*.

DICK. I don't see why not.

GEORGE (*trying to speak patiently*). Haven't I just told you. She—she loves *me*. She's loved me from the first.

DICK. Then why not make it a double wedding?

GEORGE. Double your grandmother. She can't marry both of us.

DICK. She can't do what?

GEORGE. Marry both of us, you ninny.

DICK (*indignantly*). Well, who said she could?

GEORGE. You did?

DICK (*looking GEORGE over from head to heels*). Are you crazy?

GEORGE. Crazy, nothing. Didn't you just say make it a double wedding?

DICK. Of course I did. And I say it again since you and Marion have patched it up.

GEORGE. Since who?

DICK. Since you and Marion—Marion—Marion. Are you deaf?

GEORGE. Who the devil is talking about Marion?

DICK. Why you are. You've done nothing else, but talk about her since we landed.

GEORGE (*shaking his head*). Well, if that ain't the limit.

DICK. Didn't you tell me that she loved *you*? That she's loved *you* all along? Never loved anybody else but *you*? Never could, would or should love anybody but *you—you—you*.

GEORGE. And I—I told you *that*?

DICK. You certainly did.

GEORGE (*shaking his head*). Well, one of us is batty and I know it isn't I. Why, man, it's Margaret I love. Margaret. I never dreamed of telling her so till you said—just now——

DICK. Margaret? You don't—you don't mean—you—you.

GEORGE. That's it. That's what all the row's about. Now you've got it all. Just let it soak in a bit and it'll take.

DICK (*in utter amazement*), Margaret! And you say she loves *you*. Has loved you all along? But—but where do *I* come in?

GEORGE. That's the blow I've been trying to break to you.

DICK. But why the deuce did she accept *me*?

GEORGE. That's the hardest one yet. That's what bowled me over. I haven't quite figured it out.

DICK. And—and Marion?

GEORGE. Well, that's up to you.

DICK. To—to me?

GEORGE. Didn't you say that it was Marion you meant that night in the conservatory?

DICK. Yes, but——

GEORGE. That you never knew until the next morning that you'd proposed to the wrong girl?

DICK. I know, but——

GEORGE. That having made the mistake you were game enough to play out the hand?

DICK. That's so, but——

GEORGE. If you *but* any more you'll turn into a goat. Now I'm going to send her in to you and (*looking at his watch*) you'll have just five minutes to square yourself before the procession starts.

(*Exit* GEORGE U. R.)

DICK (*starting after him*). But I—I say, don't—don't leave me like this. I—I——

(*Enter* MARION D. R.)

MARION (*looking about*). Where is he?

DICK. Who?

MARION. George said someone was here and wished to speak to me.

DICK (*fumbling with his collar*). Yes, there—there is.

MARION (*looking about again*). Why, I don't see anybody.

DICK. You're not very complimentary.

MARION (*laughing*). I beg your pardon. That was awfully rude. But I never thought of you for a second.

DICK. Thank you.

MARION. Oh dear, that's ruder yet. I mean I thought there was some one here who wished to see me particularly.

DICK. So there is. Some one who wishes to see you most particularly. (*Taking her hand*) Marion, listen to me. It's all been wrong. Wrong from the start. There's been one big misunderstanding, but one fact remains unchanged—my love for you.

MARION. For—for me? You don't mean me. Oh, I—I see you—you are joking. How foolish of me to—to take you seriously.

DICK. Marion, will you?

MARION. Will I? I don't understand.

DICK. Will you take me seriously?

(*Enter* GEORGE *briskly*.)

GEORGE. Time's up. (*To* MARION) Did he do it prettily?

MARION. Do what?

GEORGE. Do what? Moly Hoses, what's he been doing all this time?

MARION. I—don't know.

GEORGE. If that don't beat the Dutch! Well, you can't blame me! I've done my best and now you'll have to settle this out of court, for the parson's here and wants to know how soon you'll be ready.

DICK (*cheerfully*). Well, it's up to you.

GEORGE. To me? Why, what in blazes do you mean?

DICK. Why, it's your deal. I renigged. Forfeited my hand. Have you got the ring? You have to bridge it to Margaret, you know, she makes it hearts on a past make, I go back and she—well she can finesse all right.

GEORGE. Do—do you mean to say that I—now—before all those people who think that you—why I can't. I haven't got the nerve.

DICK (*patting him on the shoulder*). There, there, little one, don't be frightened, I'll hold your hand. Look at Margaret. She's game all right. Besides you can kneel, you know, as soon as he says 'til death us do part, and may the Lord have mercy on your soul.

MARION. Margaret, what does it all mean? Are you going to marry George? I thought he was going to be the best man.

DICK. So he is. The best man for Margaret. And as for us (*taking MARION's hand*), we'll have to take Dick's advice and settle our troubles out of court.

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